

Nonlinear Radiation Pressure Dynamics in an Optomechanical Crystal

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Utilizing a silicon nanobeam optomechanical crystal, we investigate the attractor diagram arising from the radiation pressure interaction between a localized optical cavity at $\lambda_c = 1542$ nm and a mechanical resonance at $\omega_m/2\pi = 3.72$ GHz. At a temperature of $T_b \approx 10$ K, highly nonlinear driving of mechanical motion is observed via continuous wave optical pumping. Introduction of a time-dependent (modulated) optical pump is used to steer the system towards an otherwise inaccessible dynamically stable attractor in which mechanical self-oscillation occurs for an optical pump red detuned from the cavity resonance. An analytical model incorporating thermo-optic effects due to optical absorption heating is developed and found to accurately predict the measured device behavior.

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Cavity-optomechanical systems involving interactions of light and mechanical motion in a mechanically compliant electromagnetic cavity [1] are of interest for precision sensors [2,3], in nonlinear optics [4,5], and in the study of macroscopic quantum systems [6,7]. To lowest order, the mechanical displacement linearly modulates the frequency of the optical resonance in a cavity-optomechanical system. This, however, gives rise to an inherently nonlinear phase modulation, and through radiation pressure backaction on the mechanical element, yields nonlinear system dynamics [8]. Much of the previous work has focused on the linearized regime where the interaction with the optical field still gives rise to a host of interesting phenomena such as a modified spring constant [9], damping or amplification of the mechanics [10], and electromagnetically induced transparency-like slow-light effects [11,12]. Recently, several experiments have pushed into the quantum regime using backaction cooling to bring nanomechanical resonators near their quantum ground state of motion [13,14].

In this Letter, we instead demonstrate new features and tools in the nonlinear regime of large mechanical oscillation amplitude. In contrast to the well-known static fixed points of an optomechanical system [15], we are interested here in the dynamic multistability associated with the finite-amplitude mechanical limit cycles that result from radiation pressure dynamic backaction. Previous experimental works have shown that a blue-detuned laser drive can lead to stable mechanical self-oscillations [16–20], and dynamic bistability has been observed for a photothermally driven micromechanical system [21] and in the collective density oscillations of an atomic Bose-Einstein condensate inside a

Fabry-Perot cavity [22]. Theoretical predictions, however, indicate that radiation pressure dynamic backaction can lead to an even more intricate, multistable attractor diagram [8]. In the present Letter we are able to verify the predicted attractor diagram and, further, utilize a modulated laser drive to steer the system into an isolated high-amplitude attractor. This introduces pulsed control of nonlinear dynamics in optomechanical systems dominated by radiation pressure backaction, in analogy to what has been shown recently for a system with an intrinsic mechanical bistability [23].

We employ a one-dimensional optomechanical crystal (OMC) cavity designed to have strongly interacting optical and mechanical resonances [24]. The OMC structure is created from a freestanding silicon beam by etching into it a periodic array of holes which act as Bragg mirrors for both acoustic and optical waves [25]. A scanning electron micrograph (SEM) of an OMC cavity is shown in Fig. 1(a) along with finite-element-method (FEM) simulations of the colocalized optical [Fig. 1(b)] and mechanical [Fig. 1(c)] resonances. To reduce radiation of the mechanical energy into the bulk, the cavity is surrounded by a periodic “cross” structure which has a full acoustic band gap around the mechanical frequency [Fig. 1(a), green overlay] [26].

The experimental setup is shown schematically in Fig. 1(d). The silicon chip containing the device is placed into a helium flow cryostat where it rests on a cold finger at $T \approx 4$ K (the device temperature is measured to be $T_b \approx 10$ K). Laser light is sent into the device via a tapered optical fiber, which, when placed in the near field of the

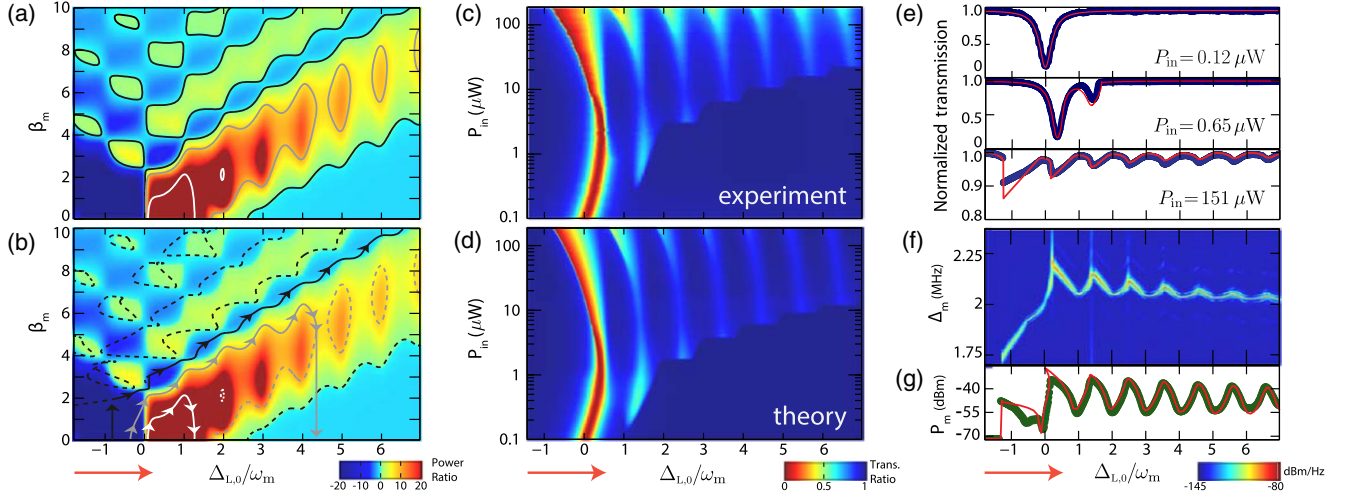


FIG. 2 (color online). (a) Calculated gain spectrum for the OMC in the amplitude-detuning plane. Color scale indicates $(P_{\text{rad}}/P_{\text{fric}} - 1)$ at $P_{\text{in}} = 151 \mu\text{W}$. Solid line curves indicate power-conserving solution contours at selected input powers: 0.65 μW (white), 6.5 μW (grey), 151 μW (black). (b) Same as (a) with contours now shifted by estimated thermo-optic effects (the intensity plot of the gain is left unshifted for reference). Solid line curves indicate the path taken by the mechanical oscillator during a slow laser frequency sweep. Dashed lines are contours which are either unstable or unreachable using this method. (c) Image plot of the measured optical transmission spectrum versus laser detuning and power. The wavelength scan rate ($\sim 300 \text{ GHz/s}$) is much slower than the internal dynamics of the optomechanical system. (d) Image plot of the theoretically calculated transmission spectra including thermo-optic shifts and a slow drift in the optical resonance frequency over the course of the measurement from low to high power. Spectra in (c) and (d) are normalized at each power level. (e) Plot of the normalized optical transmission from scans in (c) at $P_{\text{in}} = 0.12 \mu\text{W}$ (top panel), 0.65 μW (center panel), 151 μW (bottom panel). The blue points are measured data and the red curves are the theoretical model. (f) Power spectral density of transmitted pump photocurrent near the mechanical frequency for $P_{\text{in}} = 151 \mu\text{W}$. (g) Total integrated power of spectra in (f). Measured data are plotted as green circles, with the theoretical model (up to a scale factor) shown as a solid red curve. The red arrow in each plot indicates the laser scan direction.

the equilibrium is only stable when the power ratio decreases upon increasing the mechanical amplitude, $(\partial/\partial\beta)(P_{\text{rad}}/P_{\text{fric}}) < 0$ (i.e., stability is found at the “tops” of the contours) [8]. At higher powers (black contours) we see that for many laser detunings there are several stable mechanical-amplitude solutions demonstrating the presence of dynamic multistability.

In the device studied here, there is a thermo-optic frequency shift of the optical cavity caused by heating due to intracavity optical absorption. The thermal time constant of the device structure is slow relative to the optical cavity coupling rate, but fast compared to the laser scan speed. Absorption heating can thus be modeled as a shift of the laser detuning proportional to the average intracavity photon number (\bar{n}_a), $\Delta_L = \Delta_{L,0} + c_{\text{to}}\bar{n}_a$, where $\Delta_{L,0}$ is the bare laser-cavity detuning in the absence of thermo-optic effects. The per photon thermo-optic frequency shift of the optical cavity is measured to be $c_{\text{to}}/2\pi = -216 \text{ kHz}$. Including this effect, the shifted contours are shown in Fig. 2(b) as a function of the bare detuning $\Delta_{L,0}$. The solid lines with arrows indicate the expected path traversed by the mechanical resonator during a slow laser scan from lower to higher laser frequency (left to right) at each power. The dashed lines are contours that are either unstable, or unreachable by this adiabatic laser sweep. Note that while thermo-optic frequency shifts can

be up to $10\omega_m$ on resonance, the contours traced out by the laser sweep are only slightly shifted, as the laser never reaches the cavity resonance due to the thermo-optic bistability.

In Figs. 2(c)–2(g) we explore the lowest-lying contour of the attractor diagram by measuring the optical transmission as the pump laser is tuned from red to blue across the optical cavity resonance with different fixed optical input powers. At low optical input powers ($P_{\text{in}} < 0.3 \mu\text{W}$), only a single resonance dip associated with the bare optical cavity is observed. Upon increasing the laser power, radiation pressure backaction amplifies the thermal motion of the mechanical resonator beyond threshold and into a large amplitude state. When this occurs a large fraction of the intracavity photons are scattered, resulting in additional transmission dips near each detuning $\Delta_L = n\omega_m$. Physically, mechanical oscillations at the n th sideband detuning are generated by a multiphoton gain process involving n photon-phonon scattering events. This stair-step behavior is seen in the measured transmission spectrum of both Fig. 2(c) and Fig. 2(e). The theoretically calculated spectra for our measured device parameters are shown in Fig. 2(d), showing good agreement with the measured spectra after including thermo-optic effects. Figure 2(f) shows the microwave noise power spectrum at the highest measured input power ($P_{\text{in}} = 151 \mu\text{W}$),

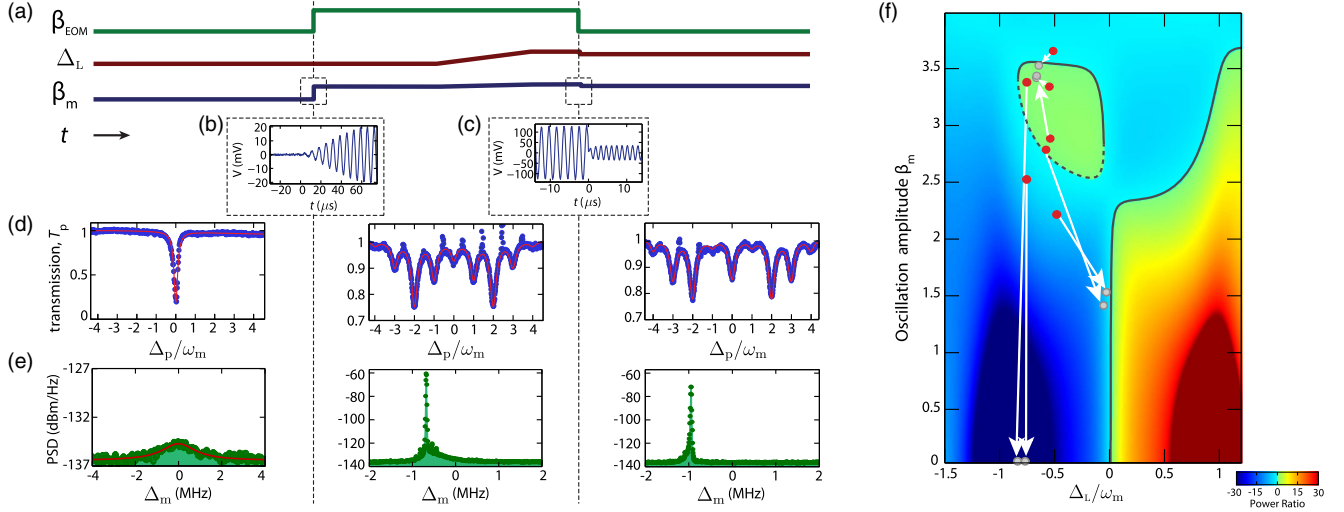


FIG. 3 (color online). (a) Schematic showing the state preparation and measurement sequence used to explore the higher-lying attractors. (b) Measured time-domain signal of one quadrature of the transmitted pump photocurrent during the turn-on of the EOM drive ($t = 0$). The signal is mixed down from the mechanical resonance frequency at 3.7 GHz to 150 kHz. (c) Measured transmitted pump photocurrent (mixed down to 500 kHz) during the turn-off of the EOM drive modulation. Here, we show a case where the system remained trapped in the high-amplitude state. (d) Transmission scans of the counterpropagating probe laser during each sequence of the measurement. Blue points are measured data and red curves are fits to the data. (e) Mechanical power spectrum (green points) during each sequence of the measurement. (f) Plot of the normalized gain spectrum in the detuning-amplitude plane with an overlaid stable solution contour (the black solid curve) at $P_{\text{in}} = 43 \mu\text{W}$. Color scale is the power ratio, $(P_{\text{rad}}/P_{\text{fric}} - 1)$. The dashed black curve indicates the unstable portion of the contour. The red data points indicate the initial (β_m, Δ_L) values and the grey data points indicate the final values. The white arrows connect the initial and final pairs but do not indicate the actual path taken by the system.

indicating a significant optical spring effect (~ 2 MHz) with complicated detuning dependence. Figure 2(g) shows the integrated power in the first motional sideband versus detuning. The discrepancy between the measured and modeled curves (the solid red line) near the largest transmission dip at the highest power is likely due to the effects of nonlinear optical absorption at high intracavity photon numbers, which are not included in our model.

It is readily apparent from Fig. 2(a) that at large optical powers (the black contour) there are also a number of isolated attractor contours at higher oscillation amplitudes. Here, we utilize external time-dependent driving of the mechanical mode to explore the lowest-lying isolated attractor on the red side of the optical cavity ($\Delta_L < 0$), where the linearized theory predicts only damping of the mechanical mode. An electro-optic modulator (EOM) is utilized to phase modulate the incoming light field [see Fig. 1(d)], resulting in an oscillating force inside the cavity which drives the mechanical resonator towards higher amplitudes. The experimental sequence is displayed in Fig. 3(a). We start with the pump laser switched on at a power of $P_{\text{in}} = 43 \mu\text{W}$, the laser detuned to the red side of the cavity resonance, and the phase modulation off ($\beta_{\text{EOM}} = 0$), which initializes the mechanical resonator into a cooled thermal state with $\beta_m \approx 0$. The EOM phase modulation is then turned on, which rings up the mechanical resonator. Following ring up, the pump laser is tuned to a starting detuning of Δ_L , completing the initialization

sequence. Finally, the modulation is switched off ($\beta_{\text{EOM}} \rightarrow 0$) and the system relaxes into a final mechanical oscillation amplitude and laser-cavity detuning.

A time domain signal of the modulated transmitted light field is measured at each stage of the above procedure by mixing down the measured photocurrent on the RSA [see Figs. 3(b) and 3(c)]. In order to determine the mechanical amplitude β_m and the true laser-cavity detuning Δ_L , we use a second counterpropagating weak optical probe laser of frequency ω_p to obtain a cavity spectrum [see Fig. 1(d) and its caption for details]. When the mechanical amplitude is large ($\beta_m \gtrsim 1$), the standard single resonance dip is transformed into a multifeatured spectrum with resonance dips at the motional sidebands, $\Delta_p \equiv \omega_p - \omega_c = n\omega_m$ [see the panels in Fig. 3(d)]. A fit to the probe spectrum is performed using Eq. (3), with β_m and ω_c as free parameters. A plot of the microwave power spectrum of the photo-detected transmitted pump light is also plotted in Fig. 3(e), showing the linewidth narrowing and frequency shift in the mechanical resonator as it transitions between different states. Repeating the measurement for different initial states and recording the resulting final states reveals the flow in the underlying attractor diagram. For clarity, only a representative subset of the 38 measurement runs performed is presented in Fig. 3(f). We find that for a narrow range of initial conditions (occurring in 22 of the 38 measurement runs), after the modulation is switched off, the system remains trapped close to the predicted top of the

higher amplitude attractor at $\beta_m \approx 3.5$ and $\Delta_L/\omega_m \approx -0.7$. For more negative initial detunings or lower initial mechanical amplitudes, the system relaxes into the trivial low-amplitude state or gets caught on the lowest-lying contour explored in Fig. 2 (for detunings $\Delta_L/\omega_m > -0.5$, the system could not be stably initialized due to the thermo-optic effect).

The results presented here represent an initial exploration of the nonlinear attractor diagram of an optomechanical system where the dominant nonlinearity is that of the radiation pressure interaction. Because of the limited drive amplitude of the electro-optic modulator used in this Letter ($\beta_{\text{EOM}} \lesssim 3.5$), we are limited to exploring only the lowest red-side attractor. With the ability to apply larger drives, or to rapidly detune the laser, it should be possible to reach higher-lying islands, and to more fully explore the attractor diagram shown in Fig. 2(a). Further understanding of the latching effects in these measurements should also pave the way to exploiting them for use in metrology experiments as the dynamics that govern whether the oscillator stably latches into an attractor can be a very sensitive function of the oscillator's displacement [8], thus yielding a precise measurement of the oscillator's environment or state. This latching also allows for systems with memory due to the hysteretic nature of the nonlinearity, as in Refs. [23,28–31]. Finally, in future devices where the optomechanical coupling rate is larger, these same nonlinearities can lead to quantum mechanical effects which have thus far only been explored theoretically [32].

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